

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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The Approaching Era and Its Problems

READ AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE BY THE EDITOR

I shall not attempt the impossible task of discussing exhaustively a subject that is large enough, and too large, for the mightiest genius and the profoundest learning among the sons of men. What are we to understand by the approaching era? By whose authority are we to conclude that another era approaches? As I have been led to believe, we are now living in the Christian era, and we expect that it will continue to extend into the coming centuries, and beyond them, unto the bright day which shall witness the bringing in of universal righteousness. It is this Christian era that holds in solution the great problems of humanity, problems that are already centuries old, and yet await perhaps other centuries of slow and painful solution. We comfort ourselves however with this added element of hopefulness, that the movement of reformatory and redemptive forces is gathering momentum, and that social and ethical growth will not be so slow in the coming years as in the past. In these last days God seems to be hastening his work. Doubtless the night is far spent. The day approaches. Perhaps we are not so very far from the era of consummation. And yet that era when it comes will still be thick with problems. The great problem of human existence, and human brotherhood, and human destiny, is not likely to be satisfactorily disposed of, even during the coming century, for men of the world are not willing to lay aside the accumulated knowledge of the centuries, and go back to him who came from the far off depths of eternity, and worked out a system of philosophy and ejected into human society the redemptive and reformatory forces of a new life that has confounded the wisdom of the wise, and puzzled the philosophers of the ages.

In our weakness and weariness we join with the idea of ultimate happiness as the complete solution of all vexing problems. But is this conception of the future consistent with the universal law of eternal progress? How old is God? Who can measure the in-

finite duration which marks the history of Deity? And yet at this present moment, upon no other mind, upon no other heart, press so many intricate, serious, vast problems, impatient and clamorous for solution. There is great comfort and strength in the reflection that all these problems of the world around us, moral, social, and political are after all God's problems, that he is dealing with them in his own way; for when we can see the finger of God at work here, there, everywhere the firm conviction of ultimate triumph gives us courage in the midst of the present perplexity, and also gives us the joy of triumph by anticipation.

But right alongside the glorious fact that God is working arises the duty and responsibility that rests upon us to work with him, to fall into line with his divine purposes, and to be his co-workers in the solution of the problems of the world. That we may do this intelligently it is desirable that we gain a clear view of the nature of these problems. To do our work well we must have some knowledge of it, we must be acquainted with its history and progress in the past, and we must master all the practical details of method and instrumentality. We presume that by the approaching era the author of our theme really meant the approaching century. For as individuals we bid fair to enter upon that century, not as idle spectators, we trust, but as earnest workers, eager to lend a helping hand to every cause of righteousness. This prospect of working far into the approaching century belongs more of course to our young people than to those of us who have journeyed far thru the century just closing. There is great hope in the spectacle of so many earnest and serious young people addressing themselves to the magnificent work of uplifting the world. There is so much to be done before it is a world in all respects in harmony with the Christian ideal. That high ideal of the world, of society, of education, of government, of international relations, of work and

worship, should be well fixed in our minds, and communicated to others. The Chinese civilization is barbaric and idolatrous largely because no higher ideal has ever entered into the consciousness of the nation. But we need not go so far from home to find an illustration. In favored America we have been grappling with tremendous problems, and every one realizes the astounding fact that we are about to make the transition from the nineteenth into the twentieth century with these problems yet unsolved. We are within a few months of the close of the most marvelous century of all the centuries in the universe of God, or for that matter, in the endless biography of God himself, and we are stepping over into another, which, if the index finger of prophecy is not deceiving us, will be more marvelous yet, and as we make the exit of the one into the other we must, whether we will or not, take with us all the unsolved problems of the present, and in addition to these there will crowd upon us new ones, problems fraught with tremendous destinies, problems coming to us according to the natural law of evolutionary growth and progress, and the present, and future generation must meet and grapple with these questions. We are to-day in the very throes of a transition which will mark a new era in the onward march of God's chariot wheel, and the duty and responsibility of coping with these great questions of human destinies rests very largely with our young people; they must meet, and to some extent, at least, solve them. Will they be prepared? But let us designate a few of these questions, both old and new:

First, our own idea of social life and civic righteousness has not yet risen above the saloon. As a nation we gaze not only with toleration but with complacency upon a social institution so utterly abominable and destructive, such a master piece of iniquity, that it is difficult to find anything worse either in history or heathendom. It is an old problem, but a problem still, because unsolved, and will continue to be one until a solution for it is found, and that will not be till the "rum traffic is pulverized," and